

DECEMBER 19, 2003

**SCHAKOWSKY: BUSH ADMINISTRATION'S MISSTATEMENT OF THE DAY -
THE ENVIRONMENT**

WASHINGTON, D.C. - U.S. Representative Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) issued today's "Bush Administration's Misstatement of the Day" on the environment.

The *Chicago Tribune* reported today that in 2001, President Bush made the following promise:

"We'll base decisions on sound science. We'll call upon the best minds of America to help us achieve an objective, which is: cleaner air, cleaner water and a better use of our land."

However, according to the same article (Julie Deardorff. "The Nature of Politics." *Chicago Tribune* 12/19/03):

[. the administration misapplied science when deciding policy on more than 20 issues, said a report by the minority party staff of the House Committee on Government Reform. The Democratic report charged that the administration also has manipulated and omitted work done by government scientists.](#)

Other federal reports have determined that regulatory agencies, including the Environmental Protection Agency and the National Park Service, made decisions on clean air and national park issues based in part on industry anecdotes and promises. And leading scientific journals have questioned both the state of scientific independence and several key Bush appointees who are former lobbyists from the industries they now regulate.

The politics of nature
Bush has said his environmental strategies
won't harm nature or man--a claim some doubt

**By Julie Deardorff
Tribune staff reporter**

December 19, 2003

Standing before a group of schoolchildren, President Bush repeated an oft-stated promise that his environmental policies would stand on hard scientific research.

"We'll base decisions on sound science," he said in 2001. "We'll call upon the best minds of America to help us achieve an objective, which is: cleaner air, cleaner water and a better use of our land."

But the role of science in forging environmental policy has grown into a central controversy of Bush's presidency. Critics say that although Bush vowed to "rely on the best of evidence before deciding," many of his policies dismiss the scientific recommendations of federal agencies.

From air to wetlands, Bush's policies have sparked a national debate, prompting a closer look at some of the most controversial environmental decisions in decades.

Tuesday, a federal judge agreed that science was being misapplied in one case. On the eve of the snowmobile season's opening day, the National Park Service was ordered to restore a plan--cast aside by the Bush administration--that will phase out snowmobile use at Yellowstone National Park.

In another development that pleased environmental groups, the administration retreated from a proposal that could have reduced federal protection for millions of acres of wetlands. Facing public opposition to the plan, the White House reaffirmed its commitment to the goal of "no net loss" of wetlands.

White House officials say "sound science" fits with Bush's market-based approach to environmental protection. The administration says it's possible to balance the need for biodiversity, clean air and clean water with economic growth, energy production and reduced regulation.

Nevertheless, the administration misapplied science when deciding policy on more than 20 issues, said a report by the minority party staff of the House Committee on Government Reform. The Democratic report charged that the administration also has manipulated and omitted work done by government scientists.

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regulate.

Snowmobile decision

In the seesaw battle over snowmobiles in Yellowstone, a judge said this week that the Bush administration's decision to relax the ban set by the Clinton administration was inconsistent with scientific findings.

In peak periods, more than 500 snowmobiles might zip through Yellowstone's west entrance in one hour, motoring along in a single corridor. Park employees, from snowmobile mechanics to west entrance workers, have complained of nausea, dizziness, headaches, sore throats and eye irritation from the high levels of toxic pollutants from snowmobile emissions. A 2000 National Park Service report on air-quality concerns related to snowmobiles found that "levels of individual pollutants found in snowmobile exhaust, including carcinogens such as benzene, can be high enough to be a threat to human health."

For wildlife trying to survive harsh winters on stored fat supplies, the roar of a snowmobile is another threat.

"Research has shown that their heart rates increase when a snowmobile passes, indicating they are stressed even if they do not move away," according to a National Park Service's State of the Parks report. "Any energy loss affects the animal's ability to survive in the winter."

Several studies by the EPA have said that banning the machines would eliminate that noise, water and air pollution and is the best way to preserve the park and its inhabitants.

A letter signed by eight former government officials, including Park Service directors, urged the Bush administration to rescind its decision.

"The Park Service should follow its own scientific studies about the adverse effects of allowing snowmobiles to continue in the parks," the letter said. "To ignore its conclusion would clearly be to accept avoidable risks to health and safety, a narrowing of beneficial uses and weaker preservation of Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks."

The public overwhelmingly supported a ban on the machines set during the Clinton administration that would have taken effect Wednesday. But the Bush administration reversed the policy and said snowmobiles could stay with some restrictions, including a daily limit on the machines at each gate--which meant fewer snowmobiles during peak periods--and the use of newer and cleaner machines. Snowmobiles were only allowed on groomed roads, about 1 percent of the 2.2 million acre park.

The National Park Service argued that its plan struck a balance between its dual missions of conservation and public access. But on Tuesday, U.S. District Judge Emmett

Sullivan rejected the argument, saying, "conservation can rarely be trumped."

Sullivan also found that the Bush decision contradicted the scientific analysis.

"There is evidence in the record that there isn't an explanation for this change and that the supplemental environmental impact statement was completely politically driven," he wrote in his 48-page brief.

Critics decry policies

In other instances, including public-land and clean-air issues, critics say the Bush administration has glossed over scientific studies in favor of industry.

Citing national energy needs, the administration has pushed to open the coastal plain of the 19 million-acre Arctic National Wildlife Refuge for oil exploration and development. Though dropped from this year's energy bill, the plan still is on the agenda, White House officials say.

Often described as "America's Serengeti" because of its abundance of wildlife, the refuge makes up 5 percent of Alaska's North Slope. The remaining 95 percent is open to drilling.

The Bush administration and industry say drilling can be performed in an environmentally friendly manner, using new technology to probe underneath the tundra without destroying the fragile arctic land. This smaller "footprint" would prevent another sprawling Prudhoe Bay--North America's largest oil field--which has turned parts of Alaska's North Slope into a gritty industrial zone.

"The whole world doesn't have to be zero sum," Bush said to Environmental Youth Award winners in 2001. "It doesn't have to be that we find more energy and, therefore, the environment suffers. We've got technologies now to make sure that we explore and protect the environment at the same time ... we need to be good stewards of the land."

Putting nature at risk?

But federal reports have found that oil exploration and development could significantly disturb the caribou, musk oxen, snow geese and other species in the coastal plain, as well as the vegetation.

Although the plain is home to more than 200 species of birds and mammals, it is the fate of the porcupine caribou herd that has been a central issue. In the spring, when the snow recedes, 130,000 caribou migrate over the mountains to the coastal plain, which is relatively predator-free and well stocked with nutritious forage.

Three times in the last 18 years, lingering tundra snow has prevented the caribou from reaching the coastal plain. In those three years, calf survival was poorer because of less

nutrition and higher levels of predation.

Pipelines and roads associated with oil development in the coastal plain area would displace the caribou cows, reducing the amount and quality of forage during and after calving and render the herd more vulnerable to predators.

"A reduction in annual calf survival of as little as 5 percent would be sufficient to cause a decline in the porcupine caribou population," according to the Fish and Wildlife Service.

"Ecological science is never cut and dry," said wildlife biologist Jim Sedinger, a member of the National Academy of Sciences committee that studied the cumulative effects of oil and gas activities on Alaska's North Slope. "When the administration is bent on development in particular areas, it gives them an out; you can never say with certainty what will happen. It's not just [the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge] issue--it's a number of them. They're using uncertainty to ignore potential impacts of lots of different activities."

Uncertainty was one of the reasons given after the administration altered scientific reports that indicate a growing problem with industry emissions and global warming.

In the EPA's annual 2002 report on air-pollution trends, a chapter on climate was omitted, even though climate change had been addressed the previous six years.

In June, the White House revised a section on global warming in the EPA's comprehensive state of the environment report. Earlier drafts had contained a section describing the risks of rising global temperatures.

Former EPA chief Christie Whitman, who stepped down in June, said the section was deleted because the agency could not agree on the science in the climate-change debate. But it sparked widespread criticism. Several members of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee called for the White House to release the unaltered version of the EPA report. The senators also said the action "brings into question the ability and authority of the EPA or any agency within this administration to publish unbiased scientific reports."